Amendments to the Drawings

The attached sheets of drawings include changes to Figs. 7 and 8. These sheets replace the replacement sheets for Figs. 7 and 8 filed on August 11, 2004. The previously omitted reference numerals from the specification (31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37) have been included in the drawings.

Attachments: Replacement Sheet

REMARKS / ARGUMENTS

Claims 9-22 remain pending in this application. Claims 1-8 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. New claims 9-22 have been added.

Priority

Applicants appreciate the Examiner's acknowledgment of the claim for priority and safe receipt of the priority document.

Drawings

Each of the Examiner's drawing objections is addressed in the order presented in the Office Action:

(1) The "sample supply unit", formerly in claims 1 and 2, and now in new claim 9, is shown, for example, as general sample loading unit 3 and urgent sample loading unit 5 shown in Fig. 1. The "mechanism for moving", formerly in claims 4, 5 and 8, is not used in the new claims. The phrase regarding "the sample buffer ... holding a plurality of sample racks arranged on a base to lie side by side", formerly recited in claim 8, and currently recited in new claims 19-22 as "said sample buffer arrangement ... holding a plurality of sample racks arranged on a base so that they lie side by side", is adequately supported by Figs. 7 and 8, which showing a plurality

of lines 31 and a line 34 holding a plurality of sample racks 13 side by side, for example.

(2) Figs. 7 and 8 have been amended to include reference numerals described in the specification.

(3) The drawings have been amended to include reference numerals pointed out by the Examiner at pages 17 and 20 of the specification.

No new matter has been added.

Specification

The objection of the specification has been overcome based upon the discussion above in item (1) under the heading of "Drawings". Namely, the "sample supply unit" has been identified and the "mechanism for moving" is no longer claimed.

35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1-8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Mimura et al (U.S. Patent No. 6,080,364). Claims 1-6 and 8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Takahashi et al (U.S. Patent No. 6,290,907). These rejections are traversed as follows.

The present invention is directed to an automatic analyzer having an analytical module for analyzing living body samples. A sample supply unit supplies

the samples and a sample collection unit collects the samples. A conveyer unit conveys sample racks with samples to be analyzed from the sample supply unit to the analytical module and conveys sample racks, for which sampling has completed, from the analytical module to the sample connection unit. A sample buffer arrangement arranged on the conveyer unit receives samples from the sample supply unit, holds them, supplies desired ones to the analytical module, receives samples returned from the analytical module and supplies returned samples to the sample collection unit. The sample buffer arrangement includes at least two buffers including a first buffer disposed at one end of the conveyer unit for receiving samples from the sample supply unit, holding them and supplying desired ones to the conveyer unit for conveyance to the analytical module. A second buffer disposed at the other end of the conveyor unit holds samples for which sampling has completed, returns samples to be re-analyzed to the analytical module and returns samples to be re-analyzed to the sample collection unit.

The conveyor unit is adapted to transfer samples for which sampling has been completed to the second buffer where they can wait for analysis results. The conveyor unit is also adapted to evacuate samples still to be subjected to sampling to the first buffer if another sample requires urgent analysis. The first buffer is adapted to supply the sample requiring urgent analysis to the analytical module via the conveyor unit from which samples have been evacuated.

None of the cited references disclose these features of the presently claimed invention. For example, Mimura et al disclose an automatic analyzer that has a plurality of analytical units to which analysis items are allocated. Mimura et al disclose a temporary storage downstream of a transfer line for holding samples to be re-examined. Mimura et al do not disclose or suggest providing a downstream buffer in connection with evacuation of a conveyor line to make room for analysis of an urgent sample. It also follows that Mimura et al do not disclose or suggest the advantages associated with the automatic analyzer presently claimed that includes such features.

Takahashi et al disclose a sample handling system in which buffer units 2a and 2b hold samples that are waiting for a specific process. For example, buffer 2a is used to hold a sample waiting for centrifuge unit 3 (see column 4, lines 41-44). Buffers 2a and 2b receive and return sample racks in a first in - first out (FIFO) manner. The default buffer 14 also operates in a FIFO manner.

Therefore, neither Mimura et al nor Takahashi et al disclose or suggest an automatic analyzer as presently claimed with a conveyor unit adapted to transfer samples for which sampling has completed to a second buffer to wait for analysis results and to evacuate samples still to be subjected to sampling to a first buffer if another sample requires urgent analysis, the first buffer being adapted to supply the sample requiring urgent analysis to the analytical module via the conveyor unit from

which samples have been evacuated. As such, it is submitted that the pending claims patentably define the present invention over the cited art.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully requests that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case.

Respectfully submitted,

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